Ibn Dayfulla's Tabaqat: An Analysis of Proto-National Identity under the Funj Sultanate in the North-Central Sudan (1504 – 1821)

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Introduction

In October 1966, Saddiq el-Mahdi, the former prime minister and grandson of Muhammad al-Mahdi, the "father" of the Mahdist movement in the Sudan, delivered a speech to the Sudanese Constituent Assembly in which he stated that: "the dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one and its overpowering expression is Arab, and this nation will not have its entity identified and its prestige and pride preserved except under an Islamic revival."[1] Al-Mahdi's assertion was revelatory in demonstrating the extent to which claims of Sudan's Arab and Islamic identity have dominated Sudanese national discourse. Indeed, Al-Mahdi was not alone in making such a claim. Since Sudan's independence in 1956, nationalist leaders from the North-Central Sudan have continuously asserted this claim. Of course, the Sudanese borders that currently define the modern Sudanese state were established during the period of Egyptian and British colonial rule and encompass a territory populated by a diverse group of people who have not necessarily identified with such an Arab and Islamic identity. These groups, for the most part located outside of North-Central Sudan have contested this limited definition of Sudanese national identity. Despite their public grievances, their political and economic weakness vis-à-vis the North Central Sudan has limited their ability to

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[1] See the Proceedings of the Sudan Constituent Assembly October 1966, as quoted in John Myhill, <u>Language, religion and national identity in Europe and the Middle East: A Historical Study</u> (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2006), 170

change the dominant public discourse and Sudanese Arab nationalist leaders continued to affirm their position that the Sudan is an Arab and Islamic state.

Given these internal fragmentations, why are Sudanese nationalist leaders persistent in defining the Sudan as an Arab and Islamic state? What are the historical roots that drive these claims? Although many scholars have analyzed the colonial roots to this question (when Sudan found itself first under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and later, the British) this thesis seeks a deeper historical understanding that pre-dates the colonial era. It seeks to identify whether there existed a proto-national identity that was distinctly Arab and Islamic in the North-Central Sudan in the period preceding Ottoman and British colonial rule during the Funj Sultanate, which governed the North-Central region of the Sudan between 1504 and 1821, prior to the Turco-Egyptian conquest. This thesis will demonstrate the existence of a North-Central Sudanese proto-national identity during the Funj era by analyzing one of the few historical texts from that time, the *Tabaqat Wad Dayfulla* (*Tabaqat*). Authored by Muhammad Ibn Dayfulla in 1805, the *Tabaqat* is a biographical dictionary of over 260 the Sufi Holymen who lived during the reign of the Funj Sultanate. This biographical dictionary is a valuable historical document as it sheds light into the Sudanese society in the North-Central Sudan during the reign of the Funj.

In order to demonstrate the existence of proto-nationalist identity in the North-Central Sudan, this thesis analyzes three main aspects of the *Tabaqat*: religion, language

and genealogy. More specifically, this thesis closely analyzes the *Tabaqat* to demonstrate how Sudanese practices that existed before the rule of the Funj merged with the spread of Islam, the Arabic language and Arabic culture to create a *new* and *distinct* proto-nationalist identity through the practice of linguistic, cultural and religious syncretism. Syncretism "describes the combination of cultural traits from distinct cultures into a new and different cultural trait.*"*[2] By analyzing the creation of Sudanese proto-national identity in the Sudan through the lens of "syncretism," this thesis aims to explain how the Arab and Islamic identity moved from being an important aspect of an individual identity to something that unites a community, to a shared, "felt" proto-national identity that united the diverse population in the North-Central region of the Sudan. Although this new identity connected the Sudan to the larger Arab and Muslim world, more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the process of cultural, religious and linguistic syncretism created a new, distinct proto-national identity in the Sudan that differed from other areas of Africa and the Muslim world.

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[2] "Syncretism." In Iberia and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005.)
https://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/content/entry/abcibamrle/syncretism/0 (accessed April 16, 2014.)

Background to the Funj Sultanate and the "Modern" Sudan

The Funj Sultanate was the first Islamic Sultanate that reigned over the North-Central region of the Sudan and unified it under one rule. It was also the first state to make Arabic its official language. Under the leadership of their *makk* (King), 'Amara I Dunqas, the Funj advanced northward from southern Gezira in 1504 to meet the local ruler of an Arab tribal federation, 'Abdallah Jamma, in the battle of Arbaji.[3] The victory of the Funj over Abdallah Jamma led to the establishment of the Funj Sultanate in 1505, and Amara I Dunqas and his successors became "direct and indirect rulers over the whole of the river valley."[4] This area was delimited by a territory between Egypt and the Kingdom of Fazughli, on the upper Blue Nile (which was itself annexed in the late seventeenth century), and from Kordofan to the West Red Sea.[5] A British traveler named James Bruce documented the oral histories that characterized the events of the battle between 'Abdallah and Amara I Dunqas in his accounts published in 1790, and explained how the Funj rulers were victorious and established their kingdom:

> In the year 1504, a black nation, hitherto unknown, inhabiting the western banks of the Bahar el-Abiad [White Nile], in about latitude 13°, made a descent in a multitude of canoes, or boats, upon the Arab provinces, and in a battle near Herbagi [Arbaji], they defeated Wad

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[3] R. S O'Fahey and Jay Spaulding, <u>Kingdoms of the Sudan</u> (London; [New York]: Methuen; Distributed by Harper & Row, Barnes & Noble Import Division, 1975), 24.

[4] Neil McHugh, <u>Holy men of the Blue Nile: the Making of an Arab-Islamic Community in the Nilotic Sudan, 1500-1850</u> (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 15.

[5] McHugh, <u>Holy men of the Blue Nile</u>, 15 .

Agreeb [the 'Abdallab ruler] and forced him to a capitulation, by which
the Arabs ['Abdallab] were to pay their conquers ....[6]

As Bruce's account reveals, the Funj victory led them to rule over a diverse group of

people. 'Amara Dunqas was the first Funj Sudanese ruler since the Meroitic times to

unite the whole riverian north under one rule.[7] The Funj Sultanate was at its prime

during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[8] Between 1504 and 1718, sixteen

monarchs from the same dynastic line, the *ansab*, reigned over the sultanate.[9] After

ruling for over three centuries, the Funj Sultanate collapsed in 1821 with the Turco-

Egyptian conquest.

With the Turco-Egyptian conquest, modern Sudan, as we know it today, was

created. Turkish rule extended from Nubia to southern Sudan.[10] For the purposes of this

thesis, what is important to note is that before the Turco-Egyptian, the North-Central

Sudan and South Sudan were not governed as a single territory. More importantly, the

new rulers built upon *existing* North-Central Sudanese proto-nationalist identity in a

project of "expansive nation state building" that spread throughout all of modern

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[6] James Burce, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768 – 1773, (Edinburgh, 2nd ed., 5 vols) as quoted in O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, 26.

[7] O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, 28.
Riverian Sudan and North-Central Sudan are used interchangeably to refer to the same region in the Sudan.

[8] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 15.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Carolyn Fluehr- Lobban, "Protracted Civil War in the Sudan-Its Future as a Multi-Religious, Multi-Ethnic State." The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, 16 (1992): 68.

Sudan.[11] And despite the inclusion of new territories during this period, Turco-Egyptian practices only served to reinforce the political, cultural and economic importance of North-Central Sudan. One important example of this is that the Turkiyya controlled their empire from a capital [that had already been established by the Funj in the north-central region. This emphasis would continue in subsequent years.

The conditions of Turco-Egyptian rule in the Sudan had terribly affected the region's economy and society and had prompted widespread discontent. In 1889, Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdi led a revolution (commonly known as the Madhiyya movement) to overthrow the Turco-Egyptian regime. The Mahdiyya was successful at using this discontent "arising from specific kind of grievances" and gathering many supporters regardless of class, territorial group.[12] When the Mahdiyya successfully overthrew Turco-Egyptian rule in 1885, al-Mahdi and his followers again strengthened the North by making, Omdurman, a city in the North-Central Sudan, their capital. The Mahdist regime was overthrown by the Anglo-Egyptian regime in 1899.

Despite their short-lived political rule, the one thing that these regimes had in common was that they all founded their capitals in the North-Central region of the

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[11] Ibid.

[12] P. M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: a Study of its Origins, Development and Overthrow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958),24

Sudan. A quote by Yusuf Hasan Fadl, a Sudanese historian, helps us understand why this occurred:

> Despite the diversity of its peoples, languages and culture, it is possible to detect a cultural and economic and political core which embraces roughly the southern part of the Northern Province , the Nile, Khartoum, the Gezira, the White Nile, and Northern Kordofan Provinces where different ethnic groups and cultures have fused to form a very integrated section of the country , and an outer area where members of three ethnic groups [black, "Hamites," and Semites] are only partially assimilated. This situation may be due to the fact that the present Republic of the Sudan is partially a product of nineteenth century political geography; yet it reflects a historical continuity which has centered around the North-Central riverian Sudan since the days of Cush and Meroe.[13]

Thus, the people of the North-Central Sudan had a common identity which united them and distinguished them from other regions in the Sudan. Although it underwent several changes from the time of the rise of the Funj sultanate to the time of independence, North-Central Sudan remained a unified core. Therefore, there needs to be an understanding of Sudan's past, and how and when a 'Sudanese' national consciousness in the North-Central Sudan emerged. Only then can scholars understand why Sudan is what is today. This thesis will examine the roots of Sudanese nationalism in the North-Central region of the Sudan and analyze whether it was distinctly Arab and Islamic. It aims to explain why the North-Central Sudan had a national

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[13] Yusuf Hasan Fadl, "The Institute of African and Asian studies and Its Role in Research on Sudan, Africa, and the Middle East," in African Studies in Africa, ed. Ahmad A. Nasir and Mahasin A. Haj Alsafi (Khartoum, 1981), 25 as quoted in McHugh, Holy Men Of The Blue Nile , 3

consciousness that diverged from the national vision of other minority groups in the Sudan.

Literature Review

Most scholars today depict Sudan as country that is divided politically, and culturally. They depict the Sudan as an "Arab" North, which is largely inhabited by Muslims, and an "African" south, where Muslims and Christians are a minority and the population is diverse in both ethnicity, religion and language.[14] Although the country is a diverse one, the union of the Modern Sudanese state has not been an equal one; since its independence the Arabs who resided in the north have monopolized all the economic and political power, while preventing the other ethnic groups in the periphery from fully participating in the governance of the country.[15] The non-Arab and non-Islamic groups in the Sudan have argued that the Arab-North used their dominant economic and political power to shape the national vision of the country and to develop their region. This imbalance has driven the discontentment of the ethnic and religious groups in the Sudan who have felt marginalized by the Northern Sudanese government.

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[14] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 1
[15] Ibid.

Since this thesis analyzes the formation and evolution of what it means to be Sudanese, it contributes to the larger scholarly literature on the formation of nationalism and national identity. With the outbreak of the first civil war between the North and South of Sudan before independence in 1955, scholars have written many books on the Sudan's painful quest to articulate an inclusive national identity. Sudan and Sudanese national identity has received increased attention especially after the Darfur crisis (2003) and the secession of the South (2011). In analyzing these events, many scholars have oversimplified the issue by only studying the consequences of British imperialism in Sudan and its role in creating a divide between the south and the north. Although the divide and rule policy of Britain has indeed played a vital role in shaping national identity in post-colonial Sudan, little scholarly attention has been paid to the formation and existence of Sudanese nationalism before this time period and the important role the Funj Sultanate played in shaping it. I will begin by discussing how these scholars analyze current debates over Sudanese national identity and then move on to texts that look at the historical construction of nationalism in the Sudan.

In *The Sudan: Contested National Identities*, Ann Mosley Lesch uses a wide range of archival evidence, interviews, and published data to explain her thesis that explains why the Sudan faced "difficulty of achieving a consensus within the Sudan concerning

its national identity."[16] She explains that the Sudan was not able to achieve a consensus regarding its national identity and posits that existing racial and religious categories have led to the internal division of Sudan since its independence. Similarly, Douglas Johnson's book, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil War*, offers an analysis of the multiple causes of the Sudan's civil wars.[17] His argument counteracts the view of scholars who provide a simplistic explanation for the causes of the North-South conflicts. He argues that several historical factors contributed to Sudan's civil wars, including the pattern of governance in the Sudan prior to the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, the emergence of militant Islam, the unequal patterns of economic development in the two regions under the colonial rule, and the elite-dominated narrow nationalistic vision of nationalist leaders.[18] Thus, his argument dismisses the 'clash of civilizations' argument adopted by some scholars of an 'Arab' versus 'African' civil war, and the argument that that artificial boundaries created under colonialism created this divergence. This book offers great insight into how British colonial rulers were able to manipulate the pre-existing divergence between the North and the South to their favor.

Another book which looks at the causes of the North-South civil wars is *New Sudan in the Making? Essays On A Nation In Painful Search Of Itself,* edited by Francis M.

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[16] Ann Mosley Lesch, The Sudan: Contested National Identities (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1999), 3

[17] Douglas H. Johnson. The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Comprehensive Peace or Temporary Truce? (Oxford: James Currey, 2011), 1

[18] Ibid, 1 - 7

Deng, which contains essays which cover most of the history of Modern Sudan. The book explores the possibilities of creating a "New United Sudan with which all Sudanese" regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or language will be treated as full citizens with all the rights.[19] Deng contends that this new Sudan would either be able to unite all the citizens of Sudan or "emerge as a failed state with devastating consequences in the region."[20] The book offers insight on the challenges Sudan needed to overcome in order to become a united nation. The essays in the book explain the causes of the North-South divergence and the evolution of the crisis which Sudan faced during independence and to present day. Similarly, Jok Madut Jok in *Sudan: Race, Religion, and Violence*, analyzes how the ethnic and religious differences contributed in fomenting violence in the Sudan.[21] The issue with this book, like the previous ones, is that it only looks at the era of colonialism and post-colonialism to explain the causes of Sudan's civil wars. It does not take into account the period before the colonial rule. Neither does it explain why North-Sudan chose to define the Sudan as an Arab state rather than an African state.

Other scholars have paid greater attention to economic and political factors that prompted Sudanese national identity. Tim Niblock's study, *Class and Power in Sudan: the Dynamics of Sudanese Politics 1898 – 1985* begins his discussion with an analysis of the

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[19] Francis Mading Deng. New Sudan in the Making?: Essays on a Nation in Painful Search of Itself (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2010), 1 - 2

[20] Ibid, 2

[21] Jok Madut Jok, Sudan: Race, Religion, and Violence (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 1- 2

economic development and the social movements in the Sudan prior to its independence from the British condominium. The book then shifts to discuss pre-independence and post-independence political and nationalist movements. He argues that the nationalist movement was mainly led by the Northern elites and explains the "dynamics of Sudanese nationalism and the events in Sudan since independence (1956) in terms of the political and social structures built under the British condominium."[22] However, like the previous study by Jok, it does not take into account the presence of a proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan that was distinctly Arab and Islamic.

Two other studies examine the role of British colonialism in shaping Sudanese politics today. Muddathir 'Abdel Rahim's *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan* is a study of the Anglo-Egyptian regime. It deals with two major topics: First, the Anglo-Egyptian agreement in 1899 and the effects it had on the constitutional and administrative development of the Sudan.[23] The book also analyzes rise of modern Sudanese nationalism from its formative years, from the 1920s – 1950s, until its achievement of independence in 1956.[24] *Living with Colonialism* by Heather Sharkey also discusses Sudanese society during colonialism.[25] Sharkey analyzes the experiences of

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[22] Tim Niblock, Class and Power in Sudan: the Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), xvi

[23] Muddathir Abdel-Rahim, Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan: A Study in Constitutional and Political Development, 1899-1956, (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1969), 14

[24] Ibid, 89

[25] Heather J Sharkey. Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1 - 2

the colonized people of Sudan and focuses on the dilemma the Sudanese people faced: being taught and assimilated into Western way of thinking while at the same time being "othered" by the imperial power.[26] Her book examines the history of colonial education to the elite of Sudan and how these educated elites paved the way for Sudan's independence from the British. However, these two books again fail to take into account why northern nationalist leaders were able to organize faster than other political parties in the country, the existing identities that helped forge their political movements, and why the leaders of these movements consistently defined the Sudan as an Arab and Islamic nation.

Although these scholars have sought to explain the root causes of ethnic conflict in the Sudan, their arguments have often offered oversimplified analysis that explains the conflict as an 'African' vs. 'Arab' civil war. This thesis aims to remedy this oversimplification by examining earlier historical processes of Islamizing and Arabizing the Sudanese region in order to provide a better understanding of the events that are currently occurring in the Sudan. Most notably, these scholars have overlooked the role the proto-national identity, which this thesis argues was present in the Sudan prior to the period of colonization.

The reason for this gap in the literature stems from the way in which many scholars understand and define nationalism. More importantly, the scholarly failure to

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[26] Ibid, 20 - 21

understand this deeper history of proto-nationalism and its role in shaping modern national movements also defines the work of nationalist scholars themselves. The prevailing perspective of nationalism in the field of history and social sciences is one that treats the concept of nations as a modern phenomenon and posits nationalism as a product of the new changes that have resulted from the era of Enlightenment and the French Revolution.[27] Most Modernists, like Benedict Anderson, argue that nationalism is both a recent and a unique product of modernization.[28] Some scholars trace the origins of nationalism to the emergence of industrial capitalism, while others believe that it is due to the use of mass communications and secular education.[29] According to such perspectives, nations and nationalism cannot exist prior to the emergence of an arbitrarily defined notion of "modernity," which means that nations could not have existed prior to the eighteenth century. Anderson, for example, highlights the importance of "print-capitalism" in bringing about the origins of nations and nationalism. He argues that "the union between printing and capitalism" led to the mass production of printed materials such as news and books.[30] He notes that with the mass production of newspapers, large groups of people were brought together "into the political arena and could begin to "imagine" the nation as a finite sovereign and cross-

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[27] Anthony D Smith. "When is a Nation?." Geopolitics 7 (2)(2002): 5.
[28] Anthony D Smith. The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant and Republic (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Pub, 2008), 2
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid

class solidarity."[31] In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson also examines the origin and spread of nationalism in both the colonial and post-colonial contexts. He defines a nation as "an imagined political community" that is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." [32]In his work, Anderson also explains how a nationalistic identity can be reformed, shaped, and created. This thesis will mainly draw upon his approach of a re-"imagined" Sudan that has been constructed artificially by the elites in one specific area of the Sudan. This view of nationalism however, is historically specific.

In contrast to Anderson's arguments, Anthony D. Smith contests the modernist's argument that nationalism is only a product of modernization.[33] Instead, he argues that there existed many forms of national community, which "depended on certain cultural traditions stemming from antiquity which have shaped their members' ethos and sense of national identity."[34] He maintains that although nations are a political entity, they needed "some kind of cultural underpinning of myth, memory, symbol, and tradition in order to create a deeper unity amongst diverse groups of peoples."[35] In addition, Smith states that factors such as organized religion help to shape ethic communities.[36]

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[31] Ibid; 4

[32] Benedict R. O'G Anderson,. Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism(London: Verso., 2006), 6.

[33] See Anthony Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations; The Antiquity of Nations (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004); The Ethnic Origins of Nations (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1987); Myths and Memories of the Nation.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010)

[34] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations 1

[35] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations, 29

[36] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations, 29

Thus, according to Smith's arguments, scholars must examine the vital role ethnicity and religion played in the creation of national identities. Indeed, for the purposes of this thesis, Smith's definition of nationalism allows for an analysis of the roots of Sudanese proto-national identity in the North-Central region of the Sudan.

This thesis relies on the Encyclopedia of Nationalism to define "proto-national identity" as an identity based "in religion, ethnicity, language, and the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity."[37] Proto-nationalist identity provided a "supralocal form of popular identification" that created the foundations which enabled for the mobilization by states and national movements.[38] Modernist scholars of nationalism generally do not take into account the role that proto-national identity played in the creation of modern nation. In addition, although there has been research conducted on the creation of nation-states *in Europe* prior to "modernity," little research has been done on the factors that led to the creation of nation-states in other parts of the world. Indeed, the scholarly literature on nationalism has often been Eurocentric and has undermined the role which indigenous cultures played in re-"imagining" their nations both before and after colonialism. Anderson, for example, argues that European colonialism helped local populations to "imagine" their nations as they reacted to colonialism. In other words, it was only European colonial governments

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[37] "V. Historians and Nationalism." In Encyclopedia of Nationalism: Fundamental Themes.
[38] Ibid

that provided colonized peoples with the modern political tools to "imagine" their nations.

Partha Chaterjee contests this notion that nationalist thought was a European import into territories under colonial rule.[39] He argues instead that the colonized world forged their own tools to "imagine" their nations during the process of colonization. According to Chaterjee, nationalism should not only be taken as a political movement.[40] Rather it was the existing social reforms and institutions in a region that help create this national imagination. Thus, 'imagining' a community was not simply something that was European or modernist, indigenous actors also played a central, if not dominant, role in imagining their own nation. He further argues that there were two realms of discourse that existed during the colonial period; the public and the private. The public was dominated by the colonizers' (or Europeans') discourse on nationalism. On this point, Chaterjee agrees with Anderson's argument that "print-capitalism" enabled the emergence of modern nationalist movements in the colonial world. However, he highlights an important factor that Anderson undermines, which is the private discourse that was guarded by the colonized. In Chaterjee's case, it was the Indian bourgeoisie, the Bhadralok, where the indigenous contribution to imagining the nation took place.

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[39] Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community? (1991)," in Empire and Nation: Selected Essays (New York: Columbia UP, 2010) 25
[40] Ibid; 26

Charterjee, however, disagrees with Smith' argument of proto-nationalism; he does not believe that private discourse had always existed. Smith's idea of proto-nationalism and the existence of nations before the modern era helps us understand the context in which modern nations have emerged. This thesis combines Chaterjee's argument about the role public verses private discourse played in shaping national identity under colonial rule with Smith's argument the pre-modern existence of proto-national identity in shaping modern national identity as the theoretical framework for its argument. Using both Chaterjee's and Smith's views on nationalism argues that the proto-national identity that was solidified in the North-Central Sudan during the reign of the Funj Sultanate was the stepping stone upon which modern Sudanese national identity emerged.

<u>Methodology</u>

The period between the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the Sudan lacks a strong primary source base with which historians can piece together its history.[41] The two literary source documents available to us from that time are the *Tabaqat wad Dayfulla* by Muhammad Ibn Dayfulla, and *The Funj Chronicle*. *The Funj Chronicle* was written by Shaykh Ahmad ibn al-Hajj Abu 'Ali in 1820, who is better known as Katib al-Shuna meaning "the clerk of the government gain-store" which was the name of the

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[41] P.M. Holt and M. W. Daly, <u>A History Of The Sudan: From The Coming Of Islam To The Present Day</u> (Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson., 2011), 21

position he held during the Turco-Egyptian conquest of the Sudan.[42][43] The *Funj Chronicle* is a detailed source of events of the last century of the Funj State before its demise. Both literary texts are valuable historical documents. However, the *Tabaqat wad Dayfulla* is the only historical text of the time that tells the history of the Funj.[44] The Sudanese Historian, Yusuf Hasan Fadl, described it as "a mine of information on social, cultural, and religious matters in the Funj Kingdom."[45]

The main aim of the author of the *Tabaqat* was to depict the history of the Funj Sultanate, and to provide a biography of its most influential holy men. In the opening chapter of the *Tabaqat*, the author clearly states his purpose for writing it:

> [A] number of brothers, may Allah shower on us and them the clouds of His kindness, and make, by the sanctity of the 'Sayyid' of the sons of 'Adnan' [Muhammad, our abode and theirs in this highest of heavenly paradises, asked me to write a history of the Sudan [Funj Kingdom], and a biography of its eminent saints."[46]

Thus, as exemplified by in the above quote, Dayfulla wanted to preserve the legacy of the Funj Sultanate by writing its history.

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[42] Ibid

[43] P. M. Holt,The Sudan of the three Niles: the Funj chronicle, 910-1288/1504-1871 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), viii; Holt and Daly, A History of the Sudan, 21

[44] Bushra Jabir Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian: An Analytical, Literary and Linguistic Study of KitaB Aṭ-ṬabaqaT," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1992) page

[45]Yusuf Fadl Hasan. *The Arabs and the Sudan: from the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century*(Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 1967), 213

[46] Muḥammad an-Nūr Ibn Dayfulla Kitāb at- Ṭabaqāt fī husūs al-auliyā' wa-'s-sālihīn wa-'l-ʿulamā' wa-'š-šuʿarā' fi 's-Sūdān. Edited by and Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan (Khartoum: University of Khartoum, 1974), 43 as translated in Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian,"246. For the Most part, I will be borrowing his translation of the tabaqat unless I state otherwise.

Although this was undoubtedly not the author's primary intention, the *Tabaqat* nevertheless offers a valuable historical document of the era and provides us with a lens to understand North-Central Sudanese society. It provides us with insight into the thoughts, values and beliefs of the people of the North-Central Sudan and the role religion, "Arabness" and genealogy played in shaping their identity. Furthermore, although the *Tabaqat* looks at the Sudanese elite at the time, it gives us a vision into the other realities of everyday Sudanese practices. In the biographical notices, the author sheds light into how the people of the North-Central Sudan lived and thought. Through reading the biographies of important Islamic holy men, we come to understand how aspects such as religion, language, and Arab lineage (*nasab*) play an important role in shaping the identities of the people in the community, and how this common identity enabled the creation of a proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan.

Of course, there are obvious limitations in analyzing only one historical text in order to understand the nature of the proto-national identity of the Sudanese living in the Northern Valley. The *Tabaqat* represents the views of elites, and not the views of the whole population who resided in the Nile valley. It is not representative of people who might have disagreed with the views of the elite. Despite this fact, the *Tabaqat* remains a valuable historical text. It sheds light into how religion, language and genealogy shaped one particular Arab-Islamic community during the reign of the Funj Sultanate. It is

important for scholars of Sudanese nationalism to take into account medieval texts to further understand the roots of North-Central Sudan's national identity.

In order to analyze the aspects of the proto-national identity in the Sudan through the *Tabaqat*, this research paper is divided into three thematic chapters. Chapter one analyzes the genealogical nature of the *Tabaqat*. It argues that claims to an Arab genealogy shaped the identity of the people who resided in the North-Central Sudan. In addition, it demonstrates that claims to an Arab genealogy were not only at an individual or familial level, but also at a tribal level. . The second chapter examines the process of Arabization in the Sudan by conducting a linguistic analysis of the *Tabaqat*. It argues that not only was Arabic spoken commonly in the Sudan, but also that the Arabic language synchronized with the local languages to create a distinct Sudanese dialect that spoken by the populations in the Nile Valley. The third and last chapter analyzes the religious element in the *Tabaqat*. It argues that the Islamic religion spread more rapidly in the North-Central Sudan during the reign of the Funj due to the individual work of Sufi holy men. These holy men made religion an important part of the North-Central Sudanese society. Thus, through spreading the teachings of the Islamic religion in the region, they played a huge role in the construction of Sudan's proto-national identity that was Arab and Islamic.

Chapter I – Religion in the Tabaqat

Scholars of nationalism have argued that religion can often play a central role in shaping national identity.[47] While recent scholarship has argued that in the last few decades, Sudanese political leaders have used the Islamic religion to gain political control of the country, the Islamic religion has always played a huge role in Sudanese society. As this chapter will argue, in the North-Central Sudan, religion began shaping Sudanese proto-national identity dating back to a much earlier time period. Although Islam had spread throughout the North-Central Sudan by the thirteenth century, it was only under the Funj Sultanate that the Islamic religion became the official religion of the state. The spread of Islam was also facilitated by Funj rulers, who actively encouraged religious scholars to establish schools all over their territory. This chapter will examine the role religion played in the creation of a proto-national identity in the Funj. It will also look role of the holymen in shaping the Sudanese identity and society through an analysis of the *Tabaqat*.

Religion and Nationalism

The importance of religion in driving nationalism and national identity is highlighted by Anthony D. Smith in the *Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*. He argues that that a nation is a "felt community;" a form of

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[47] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations; G. Hossein Razi, "Legitimacy, Religion, and Nationalism in the Middle East," The American Political Science Review, 84 (1) (1990).

human community that is characterized by a cultural and/or political identity.[48] A

central part of this community extends to religious figures and religious beliefs. Smith

stresses the impact of organized religion in the formation of national identity. He argues

that the activities conducted by religious figures, such as the performance of rituals and

the organization of religious practices, strongly contributed to the formation of

communal identity.[49] Thus, religion became an important aspect shaping not only

individual identity, but the identity of the community as a whole. Organized religion

also played a role in shaping and creating the myths and the sacred rituals that bind the

community together. As Smith argues, religion, unlike ethnicity and class, often created

one of the largest bonds between a group of people.[50]

Under the Funj Sultanate, the state increasingly worked with Islamic holy men to spread

Islam and Arabic throughout the country. With the support of the rulers, Islamic holy men

became the architects of the establishment of an Arab-Islamic community and

succeeded in creating a unified, although not uniform, community.[51] These holy men

were able able to spread their religious influence and unify the North-Central Sudan

was possible only because through the endorsement of Funj rulers.[52] Indeed, this

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[48] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations, 23

[49] Ibid; 29

[50] Razi, "Legitimacy, Religion, and Nationalism in the Middle East," The American Political Science Review, 75.

[51] Mchugh, Holymen of the Blue Nile, 97

[52] Ali Salih Karrar, The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 16

process was facilitated by the gradual religious and political consolidation of Islamic scholars themselves, a historical transformation evident in the *Tabaqat* itself. As Neil McHugh notes:

> The material in the *Tabaqat* reveals a striking transformation of the Muslim holymen in the Gezira from a scattering of individuals, distinctly autonomous and varying a great deal in social stature and lifestyle, into what may be called a community – not uniform or unified in leadership to be sure, yet increasingly consistent in apprehending common organizing principles deemed Islamic and applying them to a reconstruction of society at the grass roots.[53]

This process was further facilitated by the Funj rulers' support for the building and funding of *khalwas* (the place where the holy man resided and mentored his disciples) throughout the North Central Sudan.[54] Through these *khalwas*, the North-Central Sudanese learned to value Islamic teachings and the Arabic language.[55] The Islamic holy men thus became responsible for the transformation of North-Central Sudanese society from a Christian Nubian society to a society that had an Arab and Muslim identity.[56]

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[53] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 99

[54] Ibid; 85

[55] Ibid; 85

[56] Spencer J. Trimingham, The Influence of Islam upon Africa (London: Longman, 1980), 24

Over time, the North-Central Sudanese came to see being a Muslim as something prestigious that elevated their status in society.[57]

<u>History of Islam in the Sudan</u>

The policies of the Funj Sultanate led directly to the spread of "orthodox" Islam throughout the North-Central Sudan because of its direct support for Islamic religious scholars.[58] The Islamic religion came into contact with the Sudan when the Arab Muslims settled in the North African region the in 641 CE.[59] At that time, the Christian Nubian Kingdoms were still strong, and were able to act as a buffer to stop the spread of Islam to the Sudan.[60] With the fall of the last Nubian Kingdom and the rise of the Funj Islamic sultanate, Arabs were able to spread Islam in the North-Central region of the Sudan with no deterrents.[61] While Amara I Dunqas converted to Islam, the process of Islamizing the Sudan was primarily the work of the holy men.[62] The Funj Kingdom encouraged and welcomed ulama's and Sufi teachers to their territory.[63] As a result, that there was an influx of holymen, who often adhered of Sufi orders, who came from Egypt, Yemen, Hijaz and Morocco.[64] For this reason, during the Funj era, Islamic

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[57] McHugh, <u>Holymen of the Blue Nile,</u>

[58] Karrar, <u>The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan</u>, 15

[59] Yusuf Hasan Fadl, <u>The Arabs and the Sudan</u>, 17

[60] Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian," 12

[61] Spencer J. Trimingham, <u>The Influence of Islam upon Africa</u>. (London: Longman, 1980),

[62] Caroline Fluehr- Lobban, <u>Islamic societies in Practice,</u>(Gainsville, University Press Florida, 2004),, 147

[63] Karrar, <u>The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan</u>, 15

[64] Karrar, <u>The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan</u>, 14

teaching and the practice of Islam in the Sudan flourished. The building of mosques and

Islamic learning centers proliferated throughout the region.[65]

There were two types of Islamic Scholars during the time of the Funj. The first

were the jurists or *fuqaha* (singular, *faqih*) and the Sufi or *fuqara* (singular, *faqir*).[66]The first

group, the jurists, taught the Quran, *fiqh*, and Arabic grammar. Thus, they created

Islamic learning centers in an illiterate society.[67] These Islamic figures played a huge

role in the Sudanese society, and made the role of Islam more prominent in the Sudan.[68]

The second types of scholars, Sufis, were even more popular. The majority of Muslim

converts were:

> [A]ttracted by the activities of the second group, the Sufi
> missionaries, who introduced Sufi *tariqas* or religious orders.
> Their technique is fairly simple. After a disciple is initiated into a
> religious order, for instance the *Qadiriyya*, he is expected to
> follow a strict pattern of moral behavior and worship. The
> degree of a Sufi's success largely depends on his religious
> devotion, piousness and his mystical powers as a holy man in
> healing the sick, protecting the poor and helping the weak.[69]

The success that the Sufis achieved in the Sudan incited the jurists to "combine

teachings of Jurisprudence with Sufism to enhance their status."[70] The combination of

these two traditions was recognized by the people who resided in the North-Central

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[65] Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian," 12
[66] Ibid
[67] Ibid
[68] Ibid
[69] Ibid
[70] Ibid

Sudan. This recognition was presented by the role of the faki (a colloquial version of faqih).

The Sufi holy men were the architects of the Arab-Islamic community that was created in the North-Central Sudan, and they were the agents who allowed for the establishment of a proto-national identity that region. Many scholars of the history of North-Central Sudan argue that the activities of Sufi mentors, which were empowered and encouraged by ~~the protection of the~~ Funj rulers, "provided the agency and framework for the emergence of an Islamic society".[71] Indeed, the most prominent feature of the religious culture in the North-Central Sudan was "a tradition of mysticism personalized link between the ubiquitous holy man and his followers and institutionalized in Sufi doctrine and organization."[72] Sufi holy men taught the Quran and literacy in Arabic to the Sudanese people, and were responsible for the spread of Sufism and the Maliki *madhhab* in the North-Central Sudan.[73] Examples of these Sufi traditions included the *Qadiriyya*, *Shadhiliyya*, and *Sammaniyya*.[74] These Sufi *tariqas, still* present in the Sudan today, expressed the Islamic faith in an informal, idiosyncratic and localized manner.

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[71] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 11
[72] Ibid, 10
[73] Ibid, 11
[74] Karrar, The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan, 20

The increase in the number of the religious figures and their important contributions to the practice of Islam and its spread throughout North-Central Sudan is discussed in the introduction of the *Tabaqat*:

> *When the Funj came to power in about 1504, there flourished in these lands neither schools of learning nor of the quran; it is said that a man might divorce his wife and she be married by another the same day without any period of probation ['idda], until shaykh Mahmud al-'Araku came from Egypt and taught the people to observe the laws of 'idda. He lived in the White Nile area where he built a qasr [lit. palace' stronghold] known now as Mahmud's qasr. In the second half of the tenth century [sixteenth CE.] century A.H. Sultan Amara Abu Sikaykin [965/1157 – 976/1598-9] appointed shaykh Ajib al-Manjiluk. Early in his rule, shaykh Ibrahim al-Bulad came from Egypt to the Shayqiyya region where he taight Khalil [i.e. the Mukhtasar of Khalil b. Ishaq] and the Risala [the Risala of Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani], from where knowledge of fiqh [jurisprudence] spread in Gezira. Them after a short time, shaykh Taj al-Din al-Bahari came from Baghdad and introduced the path of Sufis [i.e. Qadiriyya] into the Funj country.*[75]

Funj rulers attracted important religious scholars who were able to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the disappearance of Christianity in the North-Central Sudan. The two most influential Sufi *tariqa* lines in the Islamic world, the *Qadiriyya* and *Shadhiliyya*, were both present in the Nilotic Sudan before 1750.[76] The *Shadhiliyya* may have possibly been introduced in the Sudan by Shadif Hamad Abu Danana, a student of a Moroccan *Shadhili tariqa* Abu Abd Allah Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Jazuli in the early eighteenth.[77] The *Qadiriyya* was probably introduced in the Sudan in the second

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[75] Ibn Dayfullah, , Kitāb aṭ- Ṭabaqāt, 41as translated in Karrar, The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan,16

[76] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile 70

[77] Ibid

half of the sixteenth century.[78] The most prominent figure of the *Qadiriyya* order was Mahmud al-'Araki.[79] He studied the Maliki law in Egypt and founded fifteen *khalwas* in the White Nile.[80] The fact that Funj rulers were able to attract these scholars is yet another testament to how important the rulers considered Islam and the support they provided in facilitating its spread to the North-Sudanese people.

The experience of North-Central Sudanese Muslims is quite unique compared to other African countries, where more than any other area, religious scholars occupied political, legal and religious roles in society. As J. Spencer Trimingham points out, "the most important aspect [of Sufi practices in the North Central Sudan] was the harmonious bled of the figh and tasawuf, the tempering of legalism with mysticism." [81] Therefore, the *fakis* were not only acting as *fuqaha* (jurists) and also *fuqara (*sufi mentors*)*. Thus, these religious figures served as the principle agents for the transmission and spread of the Islamic faith, its Holy Law, and Muslim culture in the Sudan.[82] These *faki's* played a major role in the Sudanese Muslim experience for two important reasons. First, they acted as mediators, *wasila*, between God and the individual.[83] Since the individual wanted to be saved he required a mediator between himself and the unapproachable

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[78] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 71

[79] Trimingham, The Influence of Islam Upon Africa,, 24

[80] Ibid; 24

[81] Ibid; 24

[82] P. M. Holt, Holy families and Islam in the Sudan, ([Princeton]: Program in Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, 1967)., 1

[83] S Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah: Studies in the Lives of the Scholars and Saints," Sudan Notes and Records 6 (2)(1923):195

God. (In the North Central Sudan many Sudanese Muslims considered the prophets, the saints and holy men to be that medium.) This placed the *fakis* on a higher pedestal than ordinary citizens, and because they were seen occupying a higher status, they had a great influence over the North-Central Sudan and its population Their important role in the society will be examined in the next section though an analysis of the *Tabaqat*.

Secondly, since the Sudanese people of the North-Central region regarded them them as *ulamas*, they were given a specific religious authority.[84] Thus, played a central role in the Sudanese society due to the fact that they had the knowledge and authority to dictate how Sudanese Muslims practiced their religion and functioned in the society.

Religion in the *Tabaqat*

The unique Sufi traditions that characterized the practice of Islam in the North-Central Sudan are clearly demonstrated in the *Tabaqat*. Many of the Sufi students combined the learning of the orthodox Islamic teachings with the practice of Sufism. In addition, in order to be a "properly trained" Muslim holy man one needed to have a mentor.[85] The biographies in the *Tabaqat* clearly illustrate the importance of such mentorship; they detail the course of studies each holy man pursued and the author paid careful attention to noting the name of the teachers who taught each individual

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[84]Richard W Bulliet. Islam: the View from the Edge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) , 105
[85] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 11

and who that individual went on to teach.[86] The inclusion of this information also

highlights the importance the Sufi tradition accorded to the "continuity of tradition" as

the *Tabaqat* biographies also clearly illustrate the special attention accorded to the

relationship between the mentor and his disciples and that of the disciples and their

future students.[87] There are several examples of this in the *Tabaqat*. In the following

excerpt, the author clearly notes the type of religious education the holy man had

received and the holy men who had taught him:

> *Hamad b. 'Abd ar-Rahim, commonly known as al-Hiteik. He was a Mahasi-Mashrafi origin. He began by learning theology with the jurist Arbab, studied Khalil's [Mukhtarar] under Mohammad a;-Azraq b. ash-Shaykh az-Zayn. He has good knowledge of the sirah [biography of the prophet] and [his] aljbar [stories], especially his maghazi [expeditions]. He is well-versed in fatwa and the solving of problems. He was buried in Najila[88]*

This example clearly illustrates the importance of the relationship between the student

and the Sufi mentor. Such examples are also evident in other biographies in the *Tabaqat*,

including the biography of Ash-Shaykh Muhammad al-Hamim b. 'Abd as-Sadiq b.

Malik ar-Rikabi:[89]

> *He learned the Tariq [Sufism] at the hands of ash-Shaykh Taj ad-Din al-Bahari [of Baghdad] who instructed him, guided him, helped him to attain the status of saints and made him his deputy. He said to his*

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[86] Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah: Studies in the Lives of the Scholars and Saints," 197

[87] Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah: Studies in the Lives of the Scholars and Saints," 197

[88] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 181 as translated in Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian," 30 – 31

[89] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 316

> *students: 'As much as you regard me and respect me m you should also*
> *do the same thing for him.'[90]*

As these examples reveal, the Sufi traditions in the Sudan depended on the continuity

of the Sufi tradition and spiritual lineage. This created a distinct Sufi religious culture in

the Sudan that impacted society throughout the Nilotic Sudan.

As mentioned earlier, North-Central Sudan accorded holy men a higher status in

Sudanese society. In the Sufi tradition, they served as the mediators between the

individual and God. The population of that region often regarded them as divine-like

beings, or beings who are in touch with the divine world. This reverence is also

reflected in the *Tabaqat* in the biography of Dafa' Allah b. Muhammad al-Khahlu al-

Hudhali:

> *His mother is Rayyah bt. Musa b. Hanawnah. He was born in al-Halfayah.*
> *His mother called him Dafa' Allah seeking the blessing of ash-Sheikh Dafa'*
> *Allah al-Araki who had been the Sheikh of her father. She used to play with*
> *him [her son] while he was a baby and say: 'O my pride! You are like the*
> *Shiekh of my father,' ya zahuye ya sheikh abuye. His father and mother died*
> *while he was young, and his grandfather, Musa b Hanawnah, took care of*
> *him.[91]*

His mother named him after her father's shaykh hoping that he would "bless" her.

Thus, as is evident in this example, individuals often sought the blessings of the holy

men driven by the belief that if they were blessed, they would be be saved.

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[90] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 316 as translated in Hamad,"Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian,"47

[91] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 210 as translated in , Hamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allah as a Historian,", 37

As this chapter has demonstrated, Funj rulers strongly supported the spread of Islam throughout the in the Nilotic Sudan by supporting Islamic holy men and funding Islamic schools with the hope of spreading "proper" Islamic teachings to the North-Central Sudanese people. As more Sudanese sought to be educated in these religious schools, Sufi mentors increasingly trained local Sudanese Muslims to follow their teachings.[92] But as holy men spread throughout the territory, they also adapted their practice of Islam to the ways in which the religion was practiced before their arrival. The spread of Sufi traditions in the Sudan during the Funj era thus helped forge a distinct Arab-Islamic identity in the Sudan. . Although these scholars changed the way in which the Sudanese people thought of Islam, the Sudanese also participated in shaping their own religious identity. Over time, the Sudanese community increasingly identified under the unified umbrella of being Muslim.[93] Through their Sufi practices and the education of local Sudanese holy men, Islamic holy men were responsible for constructing a new, distinct Islamic consciousness in the Nile valley that unified its people with a bond that was stronger than any other bond based on tribal or class affiliations. In the process, they made Islam of vital pillar of Sudanese proto-national identity.

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[92] McHugh, Holymen of the Blue Nile, 10
[93] Ibid; 11

Chapter II – Language in the Tabaqat

Arabic is the most commonly spoken Semitic language today and it is estimated that the language is spoken by over 200 million from Middle East and North Africa.[94] Throughout what is now the Arab world, the spread of the Arabic language accompanied the spread of Islam in the seventh century and led to a synthesis between the Arabic language and native languages spoken in each region. Thus, although Modern Standard Arabic is spoken by most Arab speakers, colloquial Arabic dialects number in the thousands.[95] This case is present in the Sudan too, and more specifically in the North-Central region because this was the first region of the Sudan to be Arabized.

The Arabization of the Sudan began with the influx of Arab nomads into the Sudan. Although the spread of Arabic to the Sudan began in the seventh century, it was under the Funj Sultanate that the language became the *lingua franca* for the state and the people and by extension, Arabic became a contributing factor in defining North-Central Sudanese identity. But the Arabic language spread did not only spread throughout the Sudan and unify the population in the use of a common language, like in other areas of the world, it also synthesized with the local language to create a dialect that is specifically Sudanese. This is evident in the *Tabaqat* as the author used both Sudanese

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[94] Kaye, Alan S. "Arabic." In <u>The World's Major Languages</u>. (London: Routledge, 2011)
[95] Ibid

Colloquial Arabic and Classical Arabic throughout the text. Through a linguistic analysis of the *Tabaqat*, this chapter demonstrates how the distinct Sudanese Arabic dialect that emerged in the North-Central Sudan under Funj rulers helped unite the people through a common language and a shared proto-national identity.

Although the spread of Arabic was a piecemeal historical process in the Sudan, today the Sudan is identified as an Arab state and the North-Central Sudanese identify themselves as Arabs.[96] Many scholars argue that Sudanese Arab-Islamic identity solidified during Sudan's fight for independence in the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast to these arguments, this chapter will demonstrate how the Arabic language helped forge an Arab Sudanese proto-national identity before the nineteenth century, during the reign of the Funj Sultanate. It argues that the North-Central Sudanese people, at that time, had their own distinct colloquial language, proving that not only were they Arabized, but that the Arabic language synthesized with the local Sudanese languages creating a distinct Sudanese Colloquial Arabic. The emergence and spread of this unique Sudanese Arabic dialect, this chapter argues, was also a key component in the formation of North-Central Sudanese national identity.

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[96] Heather J, Sharkey, "Arab Politics and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Religion and Ethnicity," <u>African Affairs : the Journal of the Royal African Society</u>,107 (426) (2008): 22 - 23.

Language and Theories of Nationalism

Language has always played a crucial role in shaping both individual and community identities. It gives individuals a sense of belonging to a group of people who speak the same language. But language has also always played a vital role, either positively or negatively, in the construction of *national* identities,[97] and in "strengthening the national cohesion"[98] of a country. Many scholars of nationalism have highlighted the importance of language in forging national identity. As the scholar of nationalism, John Myhill, argues: "national identities have been constructed around the idea that members of a national group share a common language."[99] Nations are usually "associated with language as a maker of its identity."[100] Johann Gottfried Herder and Fichte argue that through a common language, humans of the same linguistic group are able to socialize with one another.[101] They point out three main facts about language. First, that "language-acquisition" takes place in any speech community. [102] Second, that language and thought go hand in hand and that every language spoken in a group is unique from another. Finally, that the language and the thoughts that go along with this language "stamp the individual and the community with an imprint that is uniquely their own."[103]

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[97] Andrew Simpson, Language and national identity in Africa, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3
[98] Ibid
[99] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile 2
[100] Yasir Suleiman, The Arabic Language and National Identity: a Study in Ideology (Edinburgh University Press, 2003.),27
[101] Ibid; 28
[102] Ibid
[103] Ibid

Furthermore, since it is virtually impossible to date the origins of a language, the durability of a language and national identity "derives from their imagined immutability" despite the fact that languages change with time in the grammatical, phonological, and lexical senses.[104]

Language is also a primary method of socialization with others in the community.[105] An individual who has been exposed to a specific language through formal and informal means of education can become an active person in his or her community. Therefore, as Fisher points out, language plays a major role inactivating a "peculiarly sensitive web of intimacy and mutuality."[106] Furthermore, language is medium which connects the past with the present, and the future.[107] This provides the past a "weight of authority, legitimacy and righteousness."[108] Language also carries out a role with other communication facilities. These include learned habits, memories, cultural symbols, and historical events.[109] This, in turn, facilitates the birth and growth of nationalism in a given territory.[110]

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[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid; 29
[106] Ibid
[107] Ibid
[108] Ibid
[109] Deutsch, Karl W. 1966. Nationalism and Social Communication (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 97
[110] Ibid

History of Arabization in the Sudan

Due to lack of sources, we do not fully understand how the process of Arabizing the Sudan occurred. The limited amount of knowledge we have on the Arabization process is derived from two types of sources. First, historians have interpreted the process of the Arabization of the Sudan through a number of medieval Arabic writings on the Sudan. Second, historians have garnered some information through a body of texts that describe Sudanese genealogical traditions that were compiled much later, like the *Tabaqat* or *the Funj Chronicle*. Historians agree, however, that the process of Arabizing the Sudan began in the seventh century with the influx of Arab nomads into the country.[111]

Although the process of Arabization began during the 7th century, historians recognize that the spread of the Arabic language really became important with the rise of the Funj Sultanate in the 16th century. This is when Arabic became the official language of the state that reigned over the North-Central Sudan. The Funj policy that made Arabic the official language of the state helped greatly in the emergence of an Arab-Islamic proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan. The spread of the Arabic language in the Sudan also meant the absorption of Arab cultural identity. In addition, the spread of Islam throughout Funj territories also led to a greater adoption

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[111] Hasan The Arabs and the Sudan, 3

of the Arabic language, since the practice of Islam, as a religion, values the mastering of the Arabic language in order to read Islamic scripture. This further aided the consolidation of the Arabic language as the official language of the Nile Valley area.[112] The association between the spread of the Arabic language with Arab identity and Arab culture also meant that there was an emergence of a trend of Arab genealogy in that region (*nasab*).[113] Thus, the spread of the Islamic religion, the Arabic language, and the claims to an Arab genealogy (discussed in chapter three), all contributed to the emergence of a proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan that was distinctly Arab and Islamic.

The Arabization and Islamization of the Sudan was not done through military conquest but instead through interactions between local Sudanese and Muslim-Arab immigrants who settled in the region.[114] The process of Arabizing the North-Central Sudan was further accelerated by the fall of the Christian Nubian kingdoms in the early fourteenth century and the rise of the Funj in sixteenth century.[115] Until the thirteenth century, the Nubian rulers were desperately trying to maintain political power and Christian religion in the region. In the eighth and ninth centuries, Nubian Kings led military quests into Egypt in attempts to aid their fellow Christians in Egypt who were being persecuted and force Egyptian Muslim rulers

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[112] McHugh, Holy men of the Blue Nile, 9

[113] Claims to an Arab Genealogy will be discussed in my last chapter: *Genealogy in the Tabaqat*.

[114] Hasan, The Arabs and the Sudan, 3

[115] Sharkey, "Arab Idenity and Ideology in Sudan,"22

to release imprisoned Coptic Christians.[116] However, under the Mamluk rule in 1276, the Egyptians overthrew the Nubian monarch's reign in Dongola, King Dawud. [117] The Mamluks made Shakanda the ruler of Dongola (a city in North-Central and was one of the major cities in the Nubian Kingdom), and through that, Dongola became a satellite loyal to the Mamluk rule in Egypt. [118] Thus, as the Nubians lost control of one of their major cities to an Arabized and Islamized Nubian, the influence of Islam and the Arabic culture in the North-Central Sudan increased.

The influence of the Arabs was further accelerated due to the frequent intermarriage between Nubians and Arabs, which resulted in a merging of the two lineages. As a result, more and more Muslim heirs of Nubian blood were in line for the royal secession in the Nubian Kingdom.[119] One example of the presence of Muslim Nubian rulers was Sayf al-Din. He was instated as the King of Nubia under the order of the Egyptian Sultan of in order to solidify the Muslim presence in Dongola, in 1315. Sayf al-Din converted to Islam and, according to sources, became a devoted Muslim which made the sultan believe that he was fit to be ruler of Nubia. Upon hearing such news, King Karanbas sent his nephew, Kanz al-Dawka b. Shuja al-Din Nasir b. Fakhr al-Din Malik, to the sultan with an alternative suggestion. He told the sultan if he wanted a Muslim to

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[116] Hasan, The Arabs and the Sudan, 109

[117] Ibid

[118] Ibid

[119] Helen Chapin Metz, Sudan: a Country Study (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress),
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sd0019)

be the ruler King of Nubia, he should consider Kanz al-Dawla, his sister's son, as a successor to the throne since Kanz al-Dawla was the legitimate heir to the throne. The legitimacy of Kanz al-Dawla to the throne "was based on the matrilineal system of succession;"[120] a common practice by the people who inhabited the Sudan. This system worked in favor of the Arabs and enabled Arabs to become the rulers of Nubia. The sultan, however, did not agree since he wanted a ruler through which he would strengthen his influence in the Nubian Kingdom. The ruler that the sultan had in mind, Sayf al-Din, was not as popular as Kanz al-Dawla. Therefore, Kanz al-Dawla was able to assume power, and a Muslim prince of royal Nubian blood became the King of Dongola strengthening the Muslim presence in Nubia.[121] Having a Muslim ruler as a king of the Nubian kingdom in the fourteenth century shows the extent as to which the Arab Muslims had political influence in the North-Central Sudan and its Christian Nubian Kingdom.

Furthermore, the spread and expansion of Islam in North-Central Sudan coincided with the spread of Islam and the decline of the Nubian Christian Church during the 14th century.[122] In the fifteenth century, in fear of the rising power of Egypt, many communities in the North-Central Sudan formed local tribal organizations and adopted Arab protectors. The two biggest Arab protectors were the Banu al-Kanz, who were one

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[120] Hasan, The Arabs and the Sudan page, 118

[121] Metz, Sudan: a Country Study, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sd0019)

[122] Metz, Sudan: a Country Study, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sd0019)

of the first Arab immigrants to the Sudan, and the Abdallab, under the leadership of Abdallah al-Jamma'. The Banu al-Kanz had a strong influence of al-Maris and the second controlled al-Muqarra.[123] These two Arab protectorates intermarried with the Nubians, and assimilated with them. As part of this exchange for protection, many local tribes converted to Islam, and since Islamization is the twin process of Arabization in the case of the North-Central Sudan, the Nubians became more Arabized.[124] Therefore, the influx of large numbers of Arab tribesmen led to the Arabization of the Arabization of the North-Central Sudan, and by the time the Funj rose to power, most of the Nubians were completely Arabized.[125] Thus, it was a strategic decision to make Arabic the official language of the state. By doing that, the Funj were responsible for fully Arabizing the North-Central Sudan. This decision enabled the emergence of a proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan that united all Arabized Nubians under one identity of being Arab and Muslim.

Language in the *Tabaqat*

For the purposes of this thesis, one of the most interesting aspects of the *Tabaqat* is that the author relied on both Sudanese colloquial Arabic and Classical Arabic. Although many North Sudanese spoke Classical Arabic, they also spoke colloquial Sudanese Arabic that enabled them to forge their own distinct Arabic identity. Sudanese Colloquial Arabic

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[123] Yusuf Hasan Fadl, The Arabs and the Sudan, 125 - 127
[124] Yusuf Hasan Fadl, The Arabs and the Sudan, 135
[125] Yusuf Fadl , Arabs and the Sudan, 135

(SAC), "like every other spoken dialect, is not a homogenous language, with definite rules of grammar and vocabulary, but rather the common term for a number of local forms which constitute a group owing to a general similarity type, and in consequence of geographical and political contracts."[126] The use of this distinct Sudanese Colloquial Arabic in addition to Classical Arabic in the *Tabaqat* has been highlighted by several scholarly studies of the text. In his analysis, H.A. MacMichael notes the use of both forms: "The Arabic is Sudanese colloquial and presents a very interesting study. No dictionary alone would enable one to deduce the meaning of all the words and phrases: one has to read them aloud and imagine a Sudanese is speaking."[127] In his study of the linguistic form of the *Tabaqat*, S. Hillelson also notes that the author of the *Tabaqat* "employed the spoken vernacular of his country"[128] and that the "language of the book represents the spoken idiom of the Eastern Sudan [Nilotic Sudan]."[129] As these linguistic analyses demonstrate, studying the *Tabaqat* allows us to not only understand how Sudanese society functioned at that time, but also provides us with a lens through which we can understand how they spoke. Thus, if we recognize the importance of language in shaping national identity, we should also recognize how important language developments were in shaping proto-national identity in the North-Central Sudan under the Funj sultanate.

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[126] Samuel Hillelson, Sudan Arabic (London 1925) as citied in Hamad, "Wad Dayfulla as a Historian," 197
[127] H. A,MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan and Some account of the People Who Preceded Them and of the Tribes inhabiting Dàrtūr., 2 vols. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 2: 218
[128] Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah," 193
[129] Ibid

Sudanese proto-national identity was forged in the process of Sudanese Colloquial Arabic becoming the dominant language.

The author's decision to use Classical Arabic at certain times, and Sudanese Colloquial Arabic at other times is also important. In his dissertation thesis at the University of Austin Texas, Bushra Hamid Jabir argues that Wad Dayfulla uses Classical Arabic in the formal section and the colloquial language in the anecdotal section of the *Tabaqat*.[130] Using the Sudanese Colloquial Arabic in the *Tabaqat* does not mean that the author was not fluent in Classical Arabic. In fact, it is evident that the author received a formal literary training[131] and was able to "use *nahwi* [Classical] Arabic with some fluency and correctness."[132] Rather, as Hillelson argues, Wad Dayfulla saw it as a "pious duty to record the sayings of his heroes and the stories related about them in the exact linguistic form in which they had been handed down by oral tradition."[133] The use of both Classical and Sudanese Colloquial Arabic in the *Tabaqat* can be analyzed through the linguistic phenomenon that Charles A. Ferguson called "diglossia."

According to Ferguson, diglossia is when "two or more varieties of the same language are used by some speakers under different conditions."[134] Greek, Arabic,

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[130] Hamad, "Wad Dayf Allah as a Historian," 197

[131] At that time, all the nobles and the educated men of the Sudan were trained to speak and write in Classical Arabic.

[132] Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah,", 193

[133] Ibid

[134] Hamad, "Wad Dayf Allah as a Historian,"199

Haitian Creole, and Swiss German languages are all examples Ferguson uses to analyze the concept and notes that that there are common characteristics among all diglossic situations.[135] First, there is a strict division between two varieties of representative language.[136] The two varieties are the superposed, the high variety (H)which is used in formal settings , and the vernacular, Low variety (L) used in informal settings. Second, although the two varieties are related, the H variety is structurally more complex than the L variety. Third, the H variety is highly valued than the L variety since the H variety is often used in written form and there is a substantial body of literature written in the H variety form. Forth, the H variety is standardized since the H variety has already established grammatical rules and there are dictionaries written in the H variety. Fifth, L variety is the language spoken in the households and in the community, while the H variety is usually taught in schools.[137]

Keeping these characteristics in mind, Ferguson defines Diglossia as:

> a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken

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[135] "Diglossia." The *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.)
https://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/content/entry/cupelanscis/diglossia/0
[136] Ibid
[137] Ibid

purposes but is not used by any section of the community for ordinary conversation.[138]

In the *Tabaqat*, Wad Dayfulla uses both the H and L varieties of Arabic.[139] The following section provide examples of excerpts from the biographic dictionary in which Dayfulla used both Classical and Colloquial Sudanese Arabic. Before looking at three biographies in which this situation is present, an example from the *Tabaqat* will be provided to show the difference between (H) variety and (L) variety:

(H)

> *fa qult: su'al al-mayyit la yatarattab 'alayhi hukm shar'I wa inama huwa min bab karamat al-'awliya.* (I said: the questioning of the dean does not entail a legal judgment; it is merely a manifestation of the karamat of the saints)[140]

This quote from the *Tabaqat* is only written in the Classical Arabic language. However, in some cases, both the Classical Arabic and the SAC are used in one sentence. This entails a fusion between the two, which is present in several biographies. For example:

(L) and (H)

> *Safarakum ila hadha ar-rajul nanzur fi amuuh fa in wajadnahuh 'ala haqq salakna alayhi tariq al-qawm wa in wajadnahu 'ala batil naradduh minhu* (Let us go to this man to see what the matter with him is! If we find that he is following the straight path we shall study Sufism under him; if we find that he is a liar, we will put him straight.)[141]

The only word in this sentence that is not written in the Classical Arabic form is

Safarakum, which is written in the colloquial. If it was written in the Classical Arabic form,

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[138] Ibid

[139] Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 200

[140] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 53 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 204*t*

[141] Ibn Dayfulla, <u>Kitab at-Tabaqat</u>, 55 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 204

it would have been: *hayya bina nusafir*. Furthermore, the author uses some SAC words or full sentences in his writings for example: *Raqad fi dara shidarah wa ghattohu bei quffah* (he slept under the shade if a tree and they covered him with a quffah.)[142]

There are more examples in the *Tabaqat* which show that Dayfulla uses both Classical and Sudanese Colloquial Arabic in his writing. The following section provide three more examples to to show how both the H and L varieties of the Arabic language are present in the *Tabaqat.* An example of how both the Colloquial Sudanese Arabic and Classical Arabic were incorporated intro the text can be seen in the biography of Hasan Walad Hassunah (#66).He was the son of a Moroccan who came and settled in the Mesalamia and married a Sudanese woman.[143] In the beginning of the biography, Dayfulla uses Classical Arabic. However, when he Dayfulla discusses Hasan's dream in the *Tabaqat*, he switches from Classical to colloquial Arabic interchangeably. Moreover, he switches between (H) and (L) varieties. In the section before the narration of the dream itself, Hasan encountered a Shaykh who he thought was his Sufi mentor. The *Shaykh* told him that he is not his mentor, and instructed him to go to Ba'udah where his Sufi mentor awaits him. The Shaykh's order was: *Ana mani sheikhak. Amshi adkhullak kjalwah fi Ba'udah fa inna sheikhak yajik fiha*. (I am not your instructor. Go a d enter a *khalwah* in Ba'udah. Your instructor awaits you there.) [144] In this section, Wad Dayfulla writes in SAC. The

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[142] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 57 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 205
[143] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 133
[144] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 133 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 206

word *mani* is in colloquial, (L) variety, it Classical Arabic, (H) variety, it is *lastu*. The word *Amshi* is also colloquial; it is *imshi* in (H) variety.[145] In the preceding section where Hasan meets his instructor, the author switches to Classical Arabic. This is due to the fact that, in the dream, Hasan's Sufi instructor is Prophet Muhammad himself. It goes as follows: *thumma qadimt 'ala Ba'udah fa-ijhtalaty fiha li-adh-ghikr wa al-'ibadah* (And he said: I came upon Ba'udah and secluded myself for the *dhikr* and worship.)[146] In the sentence immediately following the above, Classical Arabic is also used: *Fa ja'ani rasul allah salla allah 'alyh wa sallam wa ma'ah Abu Bakr wa gil Ali falaqqanani adh-dhikr*. (And the prophet of Allah, may Allah grant him peace and blessing, came to me, together with Abu Bakr or maybe 'Ali, and inculcated the dhikr in me.)[147]

In this section, Wad Dayfulla does not write in colloquial. For example, the word *Ja'ani* (the came to me) is Classical Arabic while in the above section *yajik* (instead of *Yaji'uk*) is in colloquial:

> *Ana fi al-khalwa raqid ra'tyat najma kabirah fi-as-sama' ta'allaqat biha ruhi wa kharajat min jismi fa tarat fakharaqat as-samawat as-sab' fa sami't al-aqlam fa law kana ya kufi ba'd Muhammad nabi laqult tanabba't."* (One day, while I was asleep in the khalwah, I saw a huge star in the sky. This captivated my soul which subsequently departed my body and flew into heavens. There, I heard the squeaking of the pens [recording the deeds of mankind]. 'O Kufi! If there were a Prophet after Muhammad, it would be me.') [148]

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[145]Ḥamad,"Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 206

[146] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 134 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 207

[147] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 134 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 207

[148] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 134 as Translated in Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 150

The above section of the *Tabaqat* is fully written in Classical Arabic. This is due to the fact that this section is telling the story of a mystical experience that Hasan encountered. It is a "transcendent scene."[149] Therefore, one notices that Wad Dayfulla uses Classical Arabic when narrating transcendent scenes where the characters are of as higher status than the holy man such as the Prophet or angels. However, he switches to colloquial Sudanese when he talks about day-to-day interactions, like the conversation that Hasan had with the person he mistaken for his Sufi mentor, between Sudanese people.

These examples demonstrate how the Classical Arabic language and the SAC are both used in the writing of the *Tabaqat*. SAC was used more often when the author discusses narrates dreams or stories. Therefore, Hillelson's argument that the author of the *Tabaqat* used SAC when writing stories coming from Sudan's oral tradition holds ground. The use of both colloquial and Classical Arabic in the *Tabaqat* sheds light to two important discoveries. First, the fact that the author compiled oral traditional stories about Sufi saints who lived in the Sudan from 1500 to the early 1800 proves that there was a distinct Sudanese culture in the Nile Valley. Second, stories told through oral tradition were written not in Classical Arabic, but in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic. This shows that there was a synthesis between the Arabic language spoken by the incoming Arab nomads in the late seventh century and the Sudanese local languages. This process was a gradual one, and its product was a fully Arabized Sudanese community

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[149] Ḥamad, "Wad Ḍayf Allāh as a Historian," 207

in the North-Central Sudan. A linguistic analysis of the *Tabaqat* allows us to understand the process of Arabizing the Sudan and emergence of a Sudanese Arabic dialect that unified the people of the Nile Valley and provided them with a sense of a proto-national idenitity.

Chapter III: Genealogy and the Tabaqat

Several scholars of nationalism argue that claims to a common ancestry play a vital role in the creation of a national identity.[150] This is due to the fact that these claims unite people under the umbrella of an assumed common ancestry.[151]This interpretation of nationalism is particularly relevant to the North-Central Sudan, where the spread of Islam in the seventh through the fourteenth centuries was accompanied by the spread of Arab culture, the Arabic language and Arab identity. Accompanying this spread was the diffusion throughout North-Central Sudan of an assumed Arab genealogy (*nasab*).

Patrilineality, when descent and inheritance is traced through the males, is an important characteristic of Arab and Islamic societies.[152] During the Funj Sultanate, the claims to an Arab ancestry through a patrilineal descent line *replaced* existing Nubian practices of genealogical descent through a matrilineal line in the North-Central Sudan. This important shift in local genealogical practices clearly shows how Nubian culture had shifted to an Arabized and more Islamized one. This important change in cultural practices of lineal descent is clearly demonstrated in the *Tabaqat*, where the author introduces the Holy men through their patrilineal descent line. Indeed, far from a minor detail in the book, tracing genealogical descent (*nasab*) plays a prominent role in the

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[150] Scholars such as Anthony D. Smith and Pierre L. van den Berghe use the ethno-symbolic approach to explain the importance of ethnic communities in defining the nation and the process of nation building. They will be discussed in the next section.

[151] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations, 17. As mentioned in the introduction, the Modernist view of nationalism does not take into account the role ethnic ties play in the creation of a nation.

[152] Lobban, Islamic societies in Practice, 87.

Tabaqat, and by extension demonstrates the importance patrilineal genealogy (nasab) had come to play in the North-central Arabized population of the Sudan. This chapter analyzes how these claims to an Arab ancestry in the North-Central Sudan shaped proto-national identity through an analysis of the *Tabaqat*.

Genealogy and Theories of Nationalism

Genealogical ties, whether mythical or real, often play a vital role in the creation of national myths – and by extension—national identity.[153] As Anthony Smith argues, these genealogical ties and, more specifically, reputed ethnic descent lines that are "traceable through the generations to one or more common ancestors"[154] provide people with a membership to a nation in terms of assumed descent.[155] Using the ethno-symbolic approach to understand "what nation is," Smith argues that a nation is a *historical* social group.[156] It is a community of "history and destiny."[157] Thus, a myth of a presumed ethnic descent and shared historical memories are amongst the foundations upon which nations are built upon.[158] In making this argument, Smith points to intricate ties between genealogical descent and the notion of ethnicity.

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[153] Smith, The Cultural Foundation of Nations, 15.
[154] Ibid;, 1.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac, When is the nation?: Towards An Understanding of Theories of Nationalism (London: Routledge, 2005), 90.
[157] Ibid
[158] Ibid

As another scholar of nationalism, Pierre L. van Den Berghe, argues *ethnies*, or ethnicity, is "formed by groups of interacting individuals at the most elemental level: they mate and produce offspring on whom they lavish parental care."[159] This is how the most basic unit of human society is formed.[160] These "families" of nuclear or extended kin tend to intermarry, and through "several generations of endogamous marriage, form ethnies."[161] Thus, ethnies are formed through three or more generations of endogamy.[162] Over time, these ethnies may divide into sub-ethnies or merge to make super-ethnies, or combine with others and disappear. But as Berghe argues, the critical historical comment is when these ethnies are transformed into nations through state formation.[163] The process of state formation is supplemented by "the development of an ideological superstructure around the kingship, territory, symbols, and political and legal institutions."[164] The development of an ethnies into nations through the process of statehood is accompanied by an increased self-consciousness of being a group of people distinct from others. Thus, a sense of common ethnicity allows for nations to legitimize their existence. Berghie's arguments are particularly relevant for our understanding of the North-Central Sudan.

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[159] Pierre L. van Den Berghe. "Ethnies and Nations: Genealogy Indeed" in Ichijo and Uzelac, ed., When is the nation?: Towards An Understanding of Theories of Nationalism (London: Routledge, 2005), 114
[160] Ibid
[161] Ibid
[162] Ibid
[163] Ibid
[164] Ibid; 116

Therefore, for ethnic nationalists, "nations" are "already present in place at the onset of both modernity and nationalism in the form of pre-existing ethnic communities available and ready" to be "propelled into the world of political nations."[165] From this view of nationalism, the Arab nation has descended from Arab-speaking tribes, throughout history, and more specifically since the time of the Prophet. It "exhibits the classic feature of an ethnic nation."[166] Claims of a common genealogical descent have been the common grounds for the foundation of many Arab nations.[167] Since the time of the seventh century, Arabic-speaking tribes have claimed genealogical ties to the tribe of the prophet. As Smith argues, this allowed them to have the necessary tools to mobilize and achieve political autonomy.[168] Therefore, theories of nationalism need to take into consideration the "linkage between ethnicity and nationhood."[169]

The main group of patrilineally related males in Arab societies is known as the *asaba* and they are the figureheads of the descent system.[170] Patrilineal descent allows males to inherit and transfer patrilineal descent to their offspring, while the females inherit the descent, they cannot convey patrilineal descent. By extension, patrilineal descent is intimately tied to patriarchy: the figurehead of the family, such as the father,

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[165] Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations,17
[166] Ibid
[167] Ibid
[168] Ibid
[169] Ibid
[170] Lobban, Islamic societies in Practice, 89

uncle, brother and son, are the ones who make the key family decisions.[171] This kind of relationship between the females and males of Muslim societies determine many aspects of the society. For example, when a woman marries a Muslim man, she does not join her husband's patrilineage; she still keeps her last name. Her children, however, take their father's patrilineage, and not hers. When she gets a divorce, the woman is expected to return to her father's home. Her children remain legally under her custody only until they reach a certain level of maturity, at which time they return to their father's household, culturally defined as their patrilineal descent group or family.[172]

As scholars have argued, family lineage constitutes a large part of one's identity, particularly in the Muslim world.[173] Family lineage makes up a "the lengthy history of genealogy" known as *nasab*.[174] Throughout history, this long line of ancestors, traced patrilineally, was often considered a source of pride for many Muslims and it was the way in which they placed themselves in society.[175] Defining oneself through one's patrilineal descent line "expresses [one's] prestige or status."[176] Therefore, *nasab* was an central aspect of Islamic societies since it played a central role in organizing the way the society functioned. Family lineage also played an important role in day-to-day activities. Many of the activities carried out in the Muslim world were on a personal basis "though

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[171] Ibid
[172] Ibid
[173] Ibid
[174] Ibid
[175] Ibid
[176] Ibid

contracts that have been made between and through networks of extended family."[177]

Since Arab and Muslim societies functioned in a very personalized context, *nasab* became a major part of one's identity and conferred prestige or a higher status. When Arabs spread their culture to the Sudan, they brought these cultural practices with them. Claims to an Arab genealogy united the people of the North-Central Sudan and provided them with a sense of a common ancestry. Claims to a common identity gave the North-Central Sudanese people a "badge of membership" that tied them to the Arab community that resided around them.[178]

The History of Arab Genealogy in the Sudan

The Arabization of the Nubians beginning in the 7th century with the influx of Arab nomads into the Sudan, led to an important and defining shift in their society; the genealogical descent line in the Sudan shifted from a matrilineal a patrilineal one.[179] This process occurred gradually when Nubians Arabized through the intermarriage between in-coming Arabs and Nubian women, including those of noble birth.[180] The process of Arabizing and Islamizing the Sudan was not a product of military conquest, rather, it was a product of cultural assimilation and intermarriage. This willingness to mix with the local culture, accompanied by the matrilineal Nubian society on the one hand, and

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[177] Ibid

[178] McHugh, Holymen of the Blue Nile,

[179] Muddathir Abd Al-Rahīm,. "Arabism, Africanism, and Self-Identification in the Sudan". The Journal of Modern African Studies, 8 (02) (1970): 236

[180] Karrar, Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan, 14

the Arab patrilineal organization of family and tribe on the other, not only facilitated the process of assimilation and allowed the Arab immigrants to spread the religion and culture, but also gave them "reins of power and political leadership in the society."[181] As a result of this gradual shift and Arab integration in the local society, an Arab ancestry, of the new ruling elite, became the prevalent trend for many local Sudanese tribes as the Arabs integrated with the local community.[182] The penetration of Islam and the Arabs into the Sudan thus led to a profound change in the culture of the Sudan. Rather than a purely biological system of descent, in the North-Central Sudan, the proto-nationalist myth of a "claim to Arabness" gradually emerged as an important cultural shift in how society traced descent and inheritance.[183]

But claims to an Arab ancestry in North-Central Sudan occurred not only at an individual level, but also at a tribal level. In his study of Sudanese genealogy, *The History of the Arabs in the Sudan*, H. A. MacMichael points out that the Sudanese who resided in the North-Central Sudan and claimed Arab ancestry were divided into two major groups: the *Juhayna and the Ja'aliyyin*.[184] The Juhayna are the second largest group in the Sudan. The term Juhayna refers to "certain nomads the bulk of whom inhabit Sennar

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[181] Abd Al-Rahīm,. "Arabism, Africanism, and Self-Identification in the Sudan."236

[183] Aguda, Oluwadare.. "Arabism and Pan-Arabism in Sudanese Politics". The Journal of Modern African Studies.; 180
[184] MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan, 1: 197

Province in the southern Gezira."[185] Some of the members of the Juhayna trace back their ancestry to one of the sons of Ali (the prophet's son-in-law).[186] The term *Ja'aliyyin* refer to all the Muslim tribes in the Sudan who claimed ancestry descent from the Prophet's uncle, al-Abbas, through their eponymous leader Ibrahim *Ja'al*.[187] Thus, claims to an Arab genealogy changed the ways in which the Sudanese tribes defined their origin as they began to claim an exclusively Arab ancestry, while completely ignoring their Nubian origins

The Arabian patrilineal system thus changed the way in which family and tribal relations traced their ancestry, while also leading to great social change. Since the line of inheritance prior to Arab domination was through the mother, the Arabs who married local Nubian women were able to pass down the inheritance of the Nubian kingdoms to their sons, who, by then, identify themselves as Arabs sons. These practices of lineal descent and inheritance enabled the Arabs to become the political ruling elite of the North-Central Sudan as their political and economic power, while the economic and political power of Nubians gradually weakened. This explanation for the eventual fall of the Nubian Kingdom was noted with remarkable clarity by the fourteenth-century historian, Ibn Khaldun:

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[185] MacMichael, <u>A History of the Arabs in the Sudan,</u> 1:237
[186] MacMichael, <u>A History of the Arabs in the Sudan,</u> 1:237
[187] Karrār, <u>The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan</u>,.5

> [The] various tribes of Juhayna Arabs spread over the country, settled in it and made it their own … At First the Nubian kings tried to resist, but failed. Later on they tried to win them [the Arabs] over by giving them their daughters for marriage. But this led to the passing of power to some of the sons of Juhayna in accordance with the custom of the [Nubians] which bests the right to succession in sisters and their sons. Thus did the Nubians lose their kingdom and their lands passed to the bedouins of Juhayna.[188]

With the fall of the Nubian Kingdom, there was no political force to deter the process of Arabization and Islamization in the North-Central Sudan. The Arabs were successful at Arabizing and Islamizing the Sudan while extending their political control over the region. The result of the fall of the Nubian Kingdom was a "social and cultural revolution" that enabled the establishment of the Islamic Funj Sultanate in 1504.[189]

The importance of genealogical descent to Arab roots was also illustrated in other elements of society. The majority of surviving documents from the Funj era are of a genealogical nature, in addition to the *Tabaqat*, this included *The Funj Chronicle* and several travelers' accounts on the Sudan. [190] These examples further demonstrate the high importance which many Sudanese accorded to their Arab genealogy. But identification with Arab lineage would become increasingly important in North-Central

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[188] Ibn Khaldun, Tarikh (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 5, 429 as quoted in Abd Al-Rahĭm, "Arabism, Africanism, and Self-identification in the Sudan,"236

[189] Abd Al-Rahĭm, "Arabism, Africanism, and self-identification in the Sudan," 236.
I understand that these categories ("Arabs" and "Africans") are overly simplistic. However, when I refer to the two, I am talking about it historically and referring to the area where the Arabs spread their culture and religion.

[190] Holt and Daly, A History of Sudan, 25

Sudanese society in ensuring personal status.[191] Indeed, by the fifteenth the Sudanese who lacked the requisite ties to an Arab genealogy were eventually branded by authorities as uncivilized barbarians (labeled as *Hamaj*), and were liable to subjugation and enslavement.[192] Therefore, the claim to an Arab genealogy effectively became a "badge of membership in the community of Arabs" who dominated the North-Central Sudan at the time of the Funj Sultanate.[193]

<u>Genealogy in the *Tabaqat*</u>

It is evident that family lineage and Arab genealogy played a major role in the making of the Sudanese identity after the fall of the Nubian kingdom. For this reason, it should come as no surprise that genealogy also became a central component of the *Tabaqat*. The importance of genealogy in the *Tabaqat* is most clearly illustrated by the detailed biographies of holy men that identify both their tribal and patrilineal descent.

As seen in the following biographical reference detailing the life of one holy man, not only is the name of the holy-man mentioned by Dayfulla, but the biography also includes his father's name, his grandfather's name, and his great grandfather's name:

> *Abd el Dafa'i El Kandil ibn Muhammad ibn Hamad el Gamu'i" (b 1100 A.H.; d. 1180 A.H.) [1767 CE] He was born at el Halfaya and was a follower of Sheikh Khogali [ibn 'AbdelRahman] … he was taught by the faki Shukuralla el'Udi (his "Sheikh") and the feki Belal and Abu El Hasan … He created a record by teaching for 58 years and performed the*

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[191] McHugh, <u>Holy men of the Blue Nile,</u> 10.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid

> *pilgrimage … His death occurred at Sennar buy his body was taken to el Halfaya for burial.* [194]

In addition, his family name, which is taken by other members in his extended family is also mentioned in his biography- this is how the author introduced him This trend of identifying holymen through their patrilineal descent line is present in almost all of the biographies mentioned in the *Tabaqat*; they begin by giving the holy man's name or *laqab* and then note his father and grandfather, for example, Hamad b. Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Mashyakhi.[195] Such references to the lineage of patrilineal descent governed the interactions between people and made their interactions more personal.

Similarly, in most of the biographical references, the author mentioned the tribal affiliations that the holy men belonged to. As mentioned earlier, the main lines of descent had political, religious, and social role in the Sudan.[196] The North-Central Sudanese population associated themselves with these main Arab descent lines that provided them the legitimacy to claim an Arab cultural and genealogical identity. It is evident that associating oneself with an Arab tribe was important to have legitimacy. Although, today, the ethnic roots of the Funj rulers are still questioned by historians today.[197] However, the *Tabaqat* and *the Funj Chronicle* both recognize the Funj as

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[194] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, as translated in MacMichal, <u>The History of Arabs in the Sudan</u>, 1: 221
[195] Ibn Dayfulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat, 173
[196] McHugh, <u>Holy men of the Blue Nile</u>, 11
[197] Yusuf Fadl Hasan. "The Umayyad Genealogy Of The Funj," <u>Sudan Notes and Records (</u>46): 27

Umayyad descendants.[198] This is possibly due to the fact that they were a fully aware of

the influence of the Arab culture and Arab genealogy in the North-Central Sudan. Thus,

the Funj rulers might have claimed Umayyad genealogy in order to be considered

legitimate in the eyes of the Arabized Sudanese that they are ruling over.[199] David

Reubeni, a traveler who made his way through the Funj Kingdom on his way to Egypt

in the sixteenth century, wrote in his travel dairy that 'Amara Dunqas "showed great

respect to self-proclaimed descendants of Prophet Muhammad."[200] In addition, he gave

his son and his successor the Islamic name 'Abd al-Qadir.[201] Reubeni's account

highlights two important factors. First, it demonstrates that Muslims were accorded a

high status in the region. Second, due to this culturally accepted superiority of the

Muslim Arabs in the North-Central Sudan,, the Funj rulers converted to Islam and in

order to assert their legitimacy to power over the Arabized Sudanese population.[202] This

meant that claims to an Arab descent elevated ones status, and gave him the right to

participate in a society that claimed a common Arab ancestry.

As mentioned before, a claim to an Arab descent was not only important at the

individual level, but also at the tribal level. In the *Tabaqat*, Wad Dayfulla makes

reference to the Arab tribe that the holy men belonged to:

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[198] Ibid

[199] Ibid

[200]Ibid

[201] Ibid

[202] Holt and Daly, A History of Sudan, 25

Hamad b. 'Abd ar-Rahim, commonly known as al-Hitiek. He is of a Mahasi-Masharfi origin. He began leaning theology with the jurist Arbab, studied Khalil's [Mukhtasar] under Muhammad al-Azraq b. ash-Shaykh az-Zayn. He has good knowledge of the sirah [the biography of Prophet] and [his] akhbar [stories, especially his maghazi [expeditions]]. He is well-versed in fatwa and the solving of problems. He was buried in Abu Najilah.[203]

In some cases, Dayfulla also makes reference to the tribes the mother belonged to. He does so by in the biography of BanNaqa ad-darir:

BanNaqa ad-darir, the Fadil, the Ja'ali, the Wathiqi. His name is Muhammad. His mother is a Sudanese [of Funj origin.] The chief of the Funj, sandal al-ajj, is his stepmother. He is nicknamed BanNaqa because, at his birth, his mother said: ban Naqai [my purity is now manifest.] He later became the stick-carriet of King Na'il. [204]

As shown in this biographical account, the *Tabaqat* makes reference to BanNaqa's mother's tribe. One could make the assumption that although the son or daughter is a member of their father's tribe, the tribe that the mother belonged to is also important. We understand from the above biography that BanNaqa is a Ja'ali and a Funj. Both these tribes are regarded as Arab tribes in the Sudan. This shows that the holy man is a "pure Arab" from both sides of the family. Moreover, this biography demonstrates how different Arab tribes were intermarrying with one another. Thus, with this process of intermarriage between the two, we notice that the Arab tribal identity united several Sudanese tribes in the North-Central Sudan.

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[203] Ibn Dafyulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat 181 as translated in Hamad, "Wad Dayf Allah as a Historian," 31

[204] Ibn Dafyulla, Kitab at-Tabaqat as translated in Hamad 108, "Wad Dayf Allah as a Historian," 36

A recognized Arab genealogy is what gave the people who resided in the North-Central Sudan the right to be full citizens in an Arab Sultanate. This reality is reflected through the genealogical nature of the *Tabaqat*. Wad Dayfulla's *Tabaqat* highlights the importance of Arab genealogy in the Sudanese community; almost all biographies in the text mention the author's patrilineal lineage and the tribe that he belongs to. Taking scholars arguments on the importance of genological ties and nationalism, the *Tabaqat* confirms what we already know about the history of the North-Central Sudan during this time and provides a clear demonstration of proto-nationalist identity emerging from the rise in importance of Arab genealogical origins amongst the North-Central Sudanese. Of course, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, genealogy was not the only method by which proto-nationalist identity is formed in the North-Central Sudan; it was intricately tied with the spread of the Islamic religion and the Arabic language.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the religious, linguistic, and genealogical elements of the *Tabaqat*, this thesis demonstrates that there existed a distinct proto-national identity in the Nile Valley that laid the foundations for the construction of an Arab-Islamic modern Sudanese national identity at the end of the Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan. Under the Funj, North-Central Sudanese society "underwent a major transformation."[205] With the help of Funj rulers, Muslim holy men gained increasing political power and reorganized the way in which the North-Central Sudanese practiced Islam.[206] In addition, being the face of authority of Islam, these holy men played a major role in making the Islamic religion an important marker of the North-Central Sudanese people's identity. Alongside the spread of Islam came the spread of theArabic language.[207] As demonstrated in the three chapters of this thesis, under the Funj, the spread of Islam, the Arabic language and Arabic culture throughout the North-Central Sudan resulted in the creation of a distinct identity that differed from other regions of the country that would later become part of Modern Sudan.

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[205] McHugh, <u>Holy men of the Blue Nile</u> 16

[206] Ibid

[207] Ibid

When the Turco-Egyptian regime took control of the Sudan it did not bring much of a social change the North-Central Sudan. This is due to the fact that a cultural integration has already been made during the Funj. Instead, the conquest only accelerated this existing integration.[208] With the Turco-Egyptian conquest, the links between Egypt and the Sudan strengthened, and only oppressed non-Muslims and non-Arabs in the region as they were marginalized.[209] Thus, while the Arab-Muslim elite were more organized and more unified under the Turco-Egyptian conquest, the non-Arabs and non-Muslims, who were added to the Sudan boundaries due to the expansionist nature of the regime, were not assimilated into the country. Thus, even though the Sudan expanded in size, these artificial boundaries did not help in integrating the diverse ethnic groups that were added to the Sudan. More importantly, since the Turkiyya founded its capital in the North-Central region, due to political and economic reasons, the power was centralized in that region.

In the modernist view of nationalism, scholars have failed to take into account the existence of a North-Central Sudanese proto-national identity. In addition, scholars of Sudanese nationalism have failed to recognize the existence of a proto-national identity in the North-Central Valley during the Funj sultanate. Due to these failures, there is a huge gap in the literature on Sudanese nationalism; we need to know Sudan's past to

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[208] Ibid

[209] Ibid

understand its present situation. The Funj, as a pre-modern nation-state, played a central role in the creation of modern Sudanese national identity. Today, Sudan defines itself as an Arab and Islamic nation. Although modern claims to this identity ignore the voices of the Sudanese people outside of North-Central Sudan who do not identify as Arab or Muslim, it is important to recognize that nationalist leaders are not inventing their nationalist identity for political purposes. Even before the British colonized Sudan, and before Sudan gained its independence, there existed a distinct Arab and Islamic identity in the North-Central Sudan. This identity played a fundamental role in shaping Sudanese national identity today. Thus, by studying the proto-national identity in the Sudan that emerged during the reign of the Funj Sultanate, we can better understand why the major historical events that have occurred in the Sudan unfolded the way they did.

This thesis has highlighted the role that religion, language, and claims to a common ancestry played in the formation of a proto-national identity in the Sudan. One of the main actors who helped form this proto-national identity were the holy men who resided in the North-Central Sudan. The Sufi holy men were the seen "heroes of the Sudanese past."[210] . But this influence would have important consequences for the future of the Sudan. In 1889, Muhammad Ahmad the Mahdi, a Sufi from Dongola who claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet, the Mahdist revolution in 1889 to overthrow

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[210] Ibid; 10

the Turco-Egyptian regime. Today, he is called the father of Sudanese nationalism due to the fact that he was successful at gathering many supporters regardless of class, or territorial group. In the case of the Mahdiyya, this political support came from the North-Central valley of the Sudan. The Mahdi was able to successfully overthrow the Turkiyya due to his charismatic character and the authority and legitimacy of the Mahdiyya that were "inextricably linked with Muslim eschatology."[211] He claimed to be the al-Mahdi (the "guided one"), and in the Sunni tradition, al-Mahdi was "associated with the approach or end of the world."[212]

The Mahdi legitimized his revolution by claiming that the Turco-Egyptian regime was "irreligious," ruling over a devoted Muslim population, and thus, their rule was illegitimate. In September 5th 1880, Muhammad Ahmed wrote in a letter to a tribal shaykh in the North-Central Sudan stating:

> It is well known that whoever is for God and the establishment of His religion only finds ease in what pleasing to God and will only live in a place where His religion is established …. Innovation in the land had become widespread, and the ulama (religious scholars) and the disciples engage alike in it …. The only thing that remains of Islam is its name and the only thing that remains of the Quran is its representations.[213]

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[211] Kim Seacry, The Formation of the Mahdist State: Ceremony and Symbols of Authority: 1992 – 1898 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 29

[212] Ibid.

[213] Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, al-Athar al-kamila li-l-imam al-Mahdi, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim (Khartoum: Dar al-Wathaiq, 1990), 2: 59 as quoted in Seacry, The Formation of the Mahdist State, 31

Thus, as exemplified by the quote above, al-Mahdi justified his revolution by claiming that he wanted to revive the practice of Islam in the country. By claiming that, his revolution gained legitimacy, and many Sudanese sided with him. As a result, he successfully mobilized the masses by relating to something that they cherished greatly, and considered to be major component of their identity – the Islamic religion.

The Sufi *traiqas*, Sufi fraternities, played a major role in Sudan's movement towards self-determination. The Mahdist state was brought to an end with the colonization of the Anglo-Egyptian regime. However, the presence of the Sufi *tariqas* in the was still strong. Many the British allied with the leaders of the major Sufi *tariqas* such as the *Khatimiyya* and the *Madiyya*. By the time of independence, many of the leaders of these Sufi *tariqas* were educated in the Western education system, but they still held on to their native traditions. This gave them an advantage over other groups in the modern Sudan; they were well mobilized in the fight for self-determination. Thus, even at the time of independence, the Sufi leaders played a major role in shaping the national discourse, just as they had done during the reign of the Funj. The events that occurred after the demise of the Funj Sultanate shed light on the historical impact the Funj would have in shaping the future of the Sudan. This thesis highlights the importance of proto-nationalist identity as a pivotal stage in the process of the creation of modern nations. As this thesis has demonstrated, it is only by studying the reign of the Funj State that historians can understand the roots of modern-day Sudanese nationalism.

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